

OPEN LETTERS.

A plea for better botanical specimens.

An experience of five years in two of the large herbaria of this country, in which I have handled all the specimens as they came in from collectors all over the world, has confirmed my belief that too many botanists place a greater stress on quantity than quality. The distribution of C. G. Pringle's admirable specimens during the past few years, has produced among the fortunate few of his subscribers a change of opinion for the better; and the curators of herbaria, now crowded to overflowing with inferior specimens, are throwing more and more of the worthless material into the waste-basket. If exchanging botanists would give and demand none but good, complete specimens, the standard might be raised so that each addition to our numerous herbaria would be one of permanent value, not to occupy needed space until replaced by better specimens, some time in the far future.

A common fault is the breaking up of a single individual to make it go all around. Better one perfect and complete specimen in one herbarium, than many fragments in different places. Another common fault is the sending, as a complete specimen, a single individual of the smaller species. It betrays a small soul to ask that a single *Erigenia bulbosa* or *Viola blanda* shall count one in exchange. A fault in the opposite direction is the preparing of specimens too large for the herbarium sheet. I once mounted 200 species of grasses prepared by a professional collector, and every specimen that was more than sixteen inches tall, had to be moistened and pressed over.

Many extensive collectors even yet work as if picking flowers for a bouquet, in which the stem and radical leaves are not needed. The fruiting stage seems to pass unheeded by most collectors, unless they eat the fruit instead of sending it in, as there is a great dearth of fruit among the specimens and a corresponding demand for it by some of our systematic botanists.—L. H. DEWEY, *Washington, D. C.*

Pachystima Canbyi in cultivation.

I notice in the March number of the GAZETTE that mention is made of the cultivation of *Pachystima Canbyi* in Germany. I have grown it in my garden here since 1875. I gathered it in S. W. Virginia in company with Mr. Howard Shriver in that year, and as it grew comparatively well under cultivation I have kept it in my grounds since. It is called locally "rat-stripper," from the readiness with which the bark strips off the wood, leaving a long white tail, as it were. I have sent many plants of it to various parts of Europe. The closely allied species, *P. Myrsinites*, from Oregon has not as yet proved hardy with me.—GEO. C. WOOLSON, *Passaic, N. J.*